

Tourism and Hospitality Management, Vol. 26, No. 1, pp. 173-193, 2020  
 Rasul, T., Zaman, U., Hoque, M.R., EXAMINING THE PULSE OF THE TOURISM INDUSTRY IN THE ...

## EXAMINING THE PULSE OF THE TOURISM INDUSTRY IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF SOCIAL MEDIA

**Tareq Rasul**  
**Umer Zaman**  
**Mohammad Rakibul Hoque**

### *Review*

Received 30 September 2019

Revised 22 December 2019

20 February 2020

24 April 2020

Accepted 28 April 2020

<https://doi.org/10.20867/thm.26.1.10>

### **Abstract**

**Purpose** – Social media continues to be the major influencer in the lives of the millennial and generation-z in many regions of the world; especially in influencing their travel decisions. In order to validate such relationship, a systematic literature review with an end goal of closing the current gaps in knowledge with regard to the impact of social media on tourism in the Asia-Pacific region has been conducted.

**Design/Methodology** – We performed a systematic search of relevant literature through various databases including Scopus, ScienceDirect and ProQuest. In total, 25 articles were taken into consideration in which the review protocol made use of specific techniques such as PRISMA.

**Approach** – We conceptualized the differences and similarities in the Asia-Pacific tourism industry influenced by social media.

**Findings** – As a contribution to knowledge and practice, we found that the usage of social media for tourism marketing purposes is strongly correlated to the tourism industry in many countries of the APAC region. However, it has not yet been generalized as a popular tool in other nations in the region.

**Originality of the research** – This study provides practical and future recommendations concerning the influence of social media in the Asia-Pacific context that has become increasingly popular. Asia-Pacific governments need to introduce social media inclusive tourism marketing to capture the full potential of their tourism industry.

**Keywords** Social media, tourism, Asia-Pacific (APAC), development, PRISMA

## **INTRODUCTION**

The wider outreach of social media has revolutionized the global tourism industry. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube etc. potentially influence the decision-making process in the information-intensive global tourism industry (Chu and Luckanavanich 2018; Dwityas and Briandana 2017). Social media has affected every aspect of our lives, from taking informed decisions about certain products to exploring several holiday options. It has had a substantial impact on all sector industries, making it probably one of the best sources of online communication tools through the internet (Mangold and Faulds 2009). Social media is used not only to make good choices regarding leisure activities (Nyambuga 2014) but also for business purposes (Schaupp and Bélanger 2014). One of the sectors in which social media has had a strong influence is the tourism industry (Živković, Gajić and Brdar 2014). In the last few years, the tourism sector has experienced some interesting developments. Because of the recession

of the past few decades, people cut down on their vacations, which resulted in lower sales, lower incomes, and lower employment. The appearance of various social media platforms has allowed new opportunities within the tourism industry, and we now have new and very effective ways of attracting new customers through a variety of engagement and communication tools. One aspect is that people can share their personal experiences regarding a trip they made or leave a review of a place they have just visited. Social media makes decision-making easier and gives individuals better choices (Kwahk and Kim 2016; Pütter 2017).

Social media can be viewed as something positive for the tourism industry since it offers a wide range of opportunities. Recent research has shown that individuals change their decisions and plans after searching on various social platforms. It is a help to see the desired destination online and check reviews from other tourists. This information is available in many forms, such as tagging in a post, videos, comments, marketplace reviews, blogging, and notes (Hamid et al. 2016; Chung and Koo 2015). According to Bich (2016), the percentage of people who respond on social media reviews is constantly growing. Prior studies have shown that in a search among nearly 20 APAC nations including India, Malaysia, Thailand, and Nepal, social media sites (e.g., Facebook and Twitter) are ranked first amongst the most popular online tourism-based platforms. Furthermore, research on the impact of social media on the tourism industry in the Batangas province in the Philippines has shown that 87% of most tourism organizations rely extensively on Facebook pages as a marketing channel to promote tourism in this specific region, followed by YouTube, Twitter, and other blogging platforms at 28.6%, 19.5%, and 9.1%, respectively (Buted et al. 2014). On the other hand, studies found that Australia and some islands in Oceania had surprisingly limited usage of social media in promoting tourism in those countries.

Asia-Pacific region has emerged as a global tourism epicenter currently challenging both North America and Europe in terms of the number of arrivals and the value of their spending (Leung and Baloglu 2013). This study focuses on how social media has impacted the tourism industry from different perspectives, including the tourists' choice of destination country and the practical approaches that need to be considered for such development. Considering the limited research on such a relationship, we chose the Asia-Pacific region to study this impact on the tourism industry. Our paper is a systematic literature review of the current knowledge regarding this influence. This study aimed to establish clear linkages between the usage of some social media platforms in some Asia-Pacific nations and assess how the utilization of such platforms helps in developing tourism in the destination countries.

This study also assists in understanding how social media platforms influence human decision-making on travel and leisure, especially tourism in the Asia-Pacific region. This subject has not yet been extensively addressed in the tourism and hospitality literature, hence the need for a review to pave the road for future research. The Asia-Pacific nations have long been known as some of the most beautiful and exotic areas in the world where travelers from many countries seek to experience great adventures (Leung and Baloglu 2013). This is an interesting subject area for those looking for easy-access tools through which they can make informed decisions with regard to their travel and tourism activities. To achieve this goal, the review focuses on the interaction of social media users with

online platforms before going on vacation. Hence, the primary objective of this study is to provide a deeper understanding of different social media platforms as potential marketing tools and their impacts on tourists' destinations and tourism-related activities in the Asia-Pacific region. The research questions for this study include: How social media impacts the tourism industry in the Asia-Pacific region; and how can social media be further used as a source of inspiration for travelers in the Asia-Pacific region?

## **1. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **1.1. World Tourism**

The tourism industry is one of the most dynamic and pivotal sectors in the economy of many nations, producing around 10% of the world gross domestic product (GDP) and 7% of world global trade (UNWTO 2016). International arrivals of tourists totaled 1.2 billion in the last seven years. Europe was ranked as the highest, with 615 million visitors, followed by Asia and the Pacific with around 310 million (UNWTO 2008). This number has grown substantially to above the average of 4%. The most powerful growth in international tourist arrivals was recorded in the Asia-Pacific region and Africa. 2016 was a promising year in the Asia-Pacific region, with 1.2 billion (UNWTO 2017) international tourist arrivals (UNWTO 2016). This number rose by 7% in 2017 to a total of 1.322 billion and continued to grow in 2018 by 4-5% (UNWTO 2018). In other regions, it was found that Europe had also registered remarkable growth in the arrival of international tourists, with around 8% recorded in 2016 (UNWTO 2019). A similar statistic was found in Africa, that also recorded a total of an 8% increase in tourist arrivals (UNWTO 2017). Tourism in the Middle East came next, with 5%, and then America, which recorded only 6% (UNWTO 2017). The new trend in the tourism industry in 2017-2018 has led to the support of international tourism development in several destinations.

### **1.2. Asia-Pacific Tourism and the Economic Motive**

The tourism sector in Asia and the Pacific competes with traditional methods of attracting and exchanging international tourists in Europe, Africa, and the Americas (Falade-Obalade and Dubey 2014), leading to an increase in the number and value of tourists in host countries in the Asia-Pacific region. According to the World Tourism Organization, tourism in the Asia-Pacific region will grow from 331 million global visitors to 1.8 billion by 2030. In addition, the World Trade Organization reported that in 2010, Asia and the Pacific surpassed tourism in the Americas and became the second-largest tourist destination in the world, with 229 million international tourist arrivals (UNWTO 2014).

Furthermore, tourism has been considered as the primary source for improving other sectors such as employment and international trade. For instance, in some countries such as New Zealand, Thailand, and Australia, the tourism industry was found to be the primary source of foreign exchange (Rodyu and Wetprasit 2018). In both New Zealand and Australia, the tourism sector employed more than 200,000 workers, with an annual rise of 14% until 2000 (Bolton et al. 2013). In Hong Kong, which is second in terms of tourism as a major source of foreign exchange, tourism accounted for 12% of the labor force and 7% of the economy. In China, a review showed that tourism has participated

in 5% of its economy, impacting 55 million people and with profits of 14 billion US dollars. Singapore experienced equivalent economic growth, with tourism in Singapore accounting for 11.9% of GDP and 13.4% of the labor force.

These numbers show an unprecedented growth in tourism, well above the global average. This large growth may be the result of countries starting to understand the importance of tourism as a contributor to economic and social development. Moreover, this growth was driven by the support of national governments, travel facilitation through ease of visa processes and infrastructure, and the use of many marketing techniques that have assisted in the development and improvement of this business. Therefore, Asia and the Pacific are considered as potential destinations for the development of the new trend in tourism and will always remain one of the busiest tourist centers in the world. Thus, as tourism plays a central and pivotal role in providing improved progress in the economies of host countries and other sectors, countries compete to provide the best quality services and a great experience for visitors (Leung and Baloglu 2013). The need for easy-access and efficient tools to promote the tourism industry is critical for continuous development.

### **1.3. Social Media and the Creation of Opportunities**

The term social media originated in the 1990s, along with the improvements to the internet and computer technology (Cao and Hong 2011). It started to gain fame and publicity in 2008. Media can be divided into two categories, according to its time period (Reich, Levinson and Johnston 2011). First is the “old media,” namely TV, radio, newspapers, and magazines. The second category is the “new media,” which we are experiencing currently. They have similar goals and targets in terms of communication and marketing but differ in effectiveness because of the improvements. Social media has become one of the most important aspects of people’s daily lives, and the more it involves people, the more it becomes used by other sectors for spreading information in multiple ways. One of the prime functions of social media is communication, not only between friends or family members but also between customers and companies, influencers and target markets, or marketers and their clients. The number of social media users is increasing every day, and the most-used platforms are Facebook, Google, LinkedIn, Skype, Yelp, Bing, Twitter, and Trip Advisor. For example, in order to reach a specific target group of people, there’s nothing easier than using Twitter, with its more than 500 million users, or Facebook, which has more than 1.11 billion users (Hughes et al. 2012).

For a myriad of reasons, the number of users is growing each second. There are multiple benefits, but topping the list is that using social media for getting information or presenting content is free of charge; in comparison with other tools that might be expensive for the same benefits, social media tools always take first place (Ahmad and Rasul 2019; Munar 2012). Social media is counted as a great platform for sharing and exchanging information and various content aimed at specific users. On the other hand, users who need to find information use one of the numerous platforms to find it. For example, user-generated content (UGC) on sites such as YouTube and Facebook are the most popular source of information for travelers before going to a destination that they have never visited (Cox et al. 2009). Hence, social media has played a significant role in

influencing customers' behavior, having a huge impact on users' evaluations and changing their perspectives (Rasul 2016a; Rasul 2016b).

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1. Literature Search**

Systematic review and meta-analysis research have received significant attention across academic disciplines, including tourism (Shafiee et al. 2019), as these approaches offer greater generalizability about studied phenomena, seize interest of both practitioners and scholars, increase readers understanding, and offer unique insights that may not be gleaned through individual studies (Hulland and Houston 2020). A systematic search was conducted in March and April 2019 using Scopus, ScienceDirect, EBSCO (Academic Search Premier), and ProQuest. The main objective of this literature search was to find organically published, peer-reviewed studies examining the influence of social media platforms on the tourism industry based in the Asia-Pacific region. The search strategy included a combination of specific keywords and phrases, along with their corresponding synonyms. These include social media, social media platforms, tourism, development, tourist, travel, traveler, and Asia-Pacific. The keyword search was conducted as per the inclusion criteria of the studies that were searched for. Our search terms also included specific keyword indicators that were successful in retrieving articles with specific data. Once the studies were retrieved, a second reviewer assessed the included studies and made manual searches to check whether we had missed any potential data.

### **2.2. Eligibility Criteria**

Only English-language studies conducted within the Asia-Pacific region that addressed the use of social media platforms between 2004-2019 were included. No restrictions with regard to the race or ethnicity of the writers of these papers were applied. Grey literature sources were excluded. Non-peer-reviewed sources including commentaries, theses, and reviews (e.g., narrative or systematic), editorials, annual meetings, reports, and conference abstracts were also excluded. Studies that were off-topic or addressed other countries than those found in the Asia-Pacific region<sup>1</sup> were excluded.

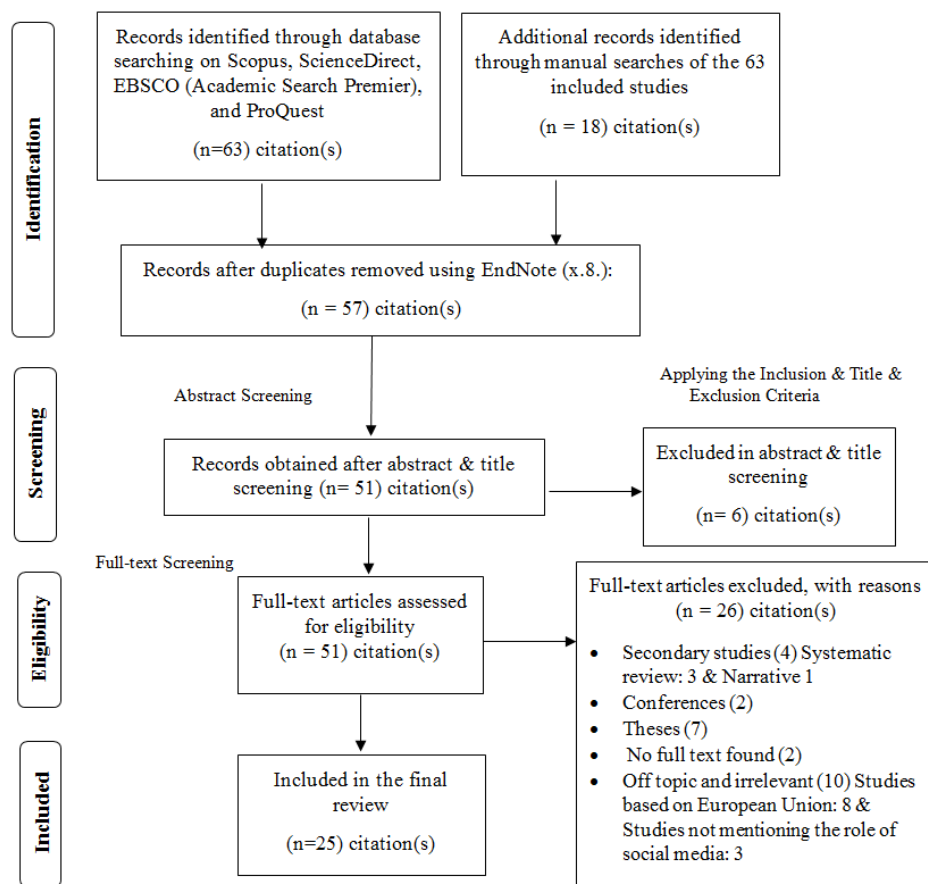
### **2.3. Screening and Data Extraction**

For this study, we have followed PRISMA – Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews (Figure 1.) – for data retrieval and reporting (Moher et al., 2009). The articles obtained from the above-mentioned databases were retrieved using EndNote x.8. and assessed for duplicates. Afterward, the renamed papers were screened for titles, abstracts, and full-texts, and the papers without full texts were subsequently excluded. The final included papers were organized in an Excel sheet file and then organized in a table that summarized the key findings.

### 3. DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

A total of 63 studies were identified through the four databases searched. In addition, 18 more studies were produced through manual searches of the reference lists of the included papers. After removing duplicates and conducting thorough title and abstract screening, a total of 51 studies were selected for the full screening stage. In this stage, 26 studies were removed since they did not meet our eligibility criteria that had been established for this study. Of those, 4 secondary studies, 2 conference abstracts, 7 master's theses, 10 off-topic papers, and 2 papers that were not found were excluded. A total of 25 studies have met our eligibility criteria for the final review and are hence included. A detailed description of our searches can be seen in Figure1.

Figure 1: **PRISMA Flow Chart Summary of Search Results**



Source: Authors' Research

### 3.1. Outcomes

Tables 1 and 2 depict studies that illustrate the relationship between social media usage and the development and growth of tourism in Asia-Pacific (APAC) countries. It was found that, surprisingly, India is the most popular APAC destination that uses social media platforms for the purpose of tourism marketing and promotion. It was represented in 28% of the included studies (N=7), followed by Malaysia, mentioned in 20% of the studies (N=5), then Indonesia and South Korea with a percentage of 16% each (N=4), and finally Nepal, Thailand, and China in only three papers each (12%) (N=3). These results go beyond our expectations since some other tourism-based countries, especially in the Oceania region (e.g., Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, and Samoa) and Southeastern Asia (e.g., Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos), have been mentioned once or twice maximum in those studies (4-8%), which casts a new light on the need for future research to be conducted in those destinations to confirm this limited use of social media for tourism purposes in those areas.

As tourism consumers are hardwired with social media and its growing applications, this systematic review showed that social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and TripAdvisor are the most popular platforms when it comes to the marketing and promotion of the APAC tourism industry. Regarding Facebook, this virtual platform community is featured in 76% (N=19) of the 25 included studies; it is followed by Twitter with 52% (N=13) and YouTube with 44% (N=11). This implies that the virtual community is probably a major online promotion tool where online travel interaction occurs and assists in informed decision-making about tourist destinations. A further novel finding is that TripAdvisor and personal blogging were also likely to be important in taking informed decisions regarding leisure activities in this region. For instance, it was evident from reviewing the literature that a large percentage of personal blogs are increasingly prevailing and rank fourth in the most popular social sites at 20% (N=4), while customer review-based sites such as TripAdvisor account for nearly 8% (N=2). It is clearly evident that the big players in those areas are local individuals who run a social media page on a social platform with the specific purpose of promoting tourism in their country of origin, while the usage of Web 2.0 based content by local governments was found to be exceedingly limited.

Table 1: Characteristics of the Included Studies (Source: Authors' Research)

Reference ID	Country of 1st Author	Emerging topic	APAC Country	Social Media Sources	Type of Business
Buted et al. (2014)	Philippines	Social network, tourism industry, hospitality, technology, Facebook	Philippines	Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and other blogging sites	Both individual and tourism companies
Chu et al. (2018)	Thailand	Travel intention, social media, travel motivation	Thailand	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube	Individual

Reference ID	Country of 1st Author	Emerging topic	APAC Country	Social Media Sources	Type of Business
Chung et al. (2015)	South Korea	Social media, travel, information search	South Korea	Social media in general (Web 2.0)	Tourism companies
Dwityas et al. (2017)	Indonesia	Consumer behavior, travel decision-making process, social media	Indonesia	Social media in general (Web 2.0)	Individual
Dwivedi et al. (2011)	India	Social media, web 2.0, travel 2.0, Facebook, Twitter	Bhutan, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Nepal, Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Fiji, and Samoa	Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, Myspace, LinkedIn	Tourism companies
Fatanti et al. (2015)	Indonesia	Destination branding, Instagram, culture marketing, social media, Indonesia	Indonesia	Instagram	Individual
Ge et al. (2014)	China	Social media marketing, marketing, communication, DMOs	China	Weibo	Tourism NGOs
Gattu (2017)	India	Social media, marketing, tourism	India	Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, blogging forums	Governmental tourism company
Hede et al. (2012)	Australia	Social media, Web 2.0, tourism	Australia	Facebook, YouTube, MySpace, Flickr, LinkedIn, Twitter	Tourism companies
Hamid et al. (2016)	Malaysia	Social media, tourist, Islamic destination	Malaysia	Social media in general (Web 2.0)	Individual



Reference ID	Country of 1st Author	Emerging topic	APAC Country	Social Media Sources	Type of Business
Hua et al. (2017)	Malaysia	Social media, tourism, perceived usefulness	Malaysia	Facebook	Individual
Indu and Bindu (2018)	India	Social media, tourism, destination marketing	India	Facebook	Tourism companies
Karim (2018)	Bangladesh	Impact, industry, social media, tourism	Bangladesh	Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube	Tourism companies
Ketter (2016)	Israel	Destination image, social media, Facebook marketing, tourism.	Nepal	Facebook	Both individual and tourism companies
Koo et al. (2013)	South Korea	Social media, tourism growth	South Korea	Facebook, Twitter	Governmental and non-governmental
Kuzma (2010)	United Kingdom	Web 2.0, eGovernment, social media, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube	Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei, Cambodia, China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Laos, Macau, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam	Facebook, Twitter, YouTube	Tourism organizations based on 50 Asian countries
Manap et al. (2013)	Malaysia	Social media, user-generated content, tourism sector	Malaysia	Facebook, Twitter	Tourism companies
Park et al. (2016)	South Korea	Local governments, social media	South Korea	Facebook	Governmental tourism organisations

Reference ID	Country of 1st Author	Emerging topic	APAC Country	Social Media Sources	Type of Business
Pabel et al. (2016)	Australia	DMOs, information search, social media, tourism	Australia	Facebook, Twitter, Google+, YouTube, Pinterest	Tourism companies
Rathore et al. (2017)	India	Social media, tourism, travel information search, online tourism	India	Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp, TripAdvisor	Individual
Tran et al. (2017)	Vietnam	Customer-generated content, social media, online travel information	Vietnam	Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, TripAdvisor	Individual
Usui et al. (2017)	Japan	Regional tourism development, social media	Japan	Blogs, YouTube, Facebook	Individual
Ravindran et al. (2018)	India	Social media, tourism, purchase decisions	India	Facebook, Twitter, blogs, forums	Individual
Sahoo et al. (2017)	India	Tourism, internet, social media, marketing, business, promotion	India	Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, YouTube, Instagram	Individual
Yang et al. (2015)	China	Social media marketing, DMOs, China	China	Weibo	Tourism companies

As social media creates powerful narrative to influence travelers' beliefs, this systematic review demonstrates that social networking tools are reliable and can be effectively used for travelers' choice or marketing purposes, as well as national tourism development. It is obvious from Table 2 that social media has a direct impact on the tourism industry; it either assists in travelers' decision-making processes regarding a trip to a specific country of destination or promotes tourism development by locals or tourism-based NGOs in a region with less exposure. This systematic review study revealed why individuals prefer to use social media not only to interact with each other but also to make informed pre-trip decisions. In addition, this study also highlights that tourism-based companies and non-governmental organizations also make travel information directly available to prospective travelers on various sites including travel agencies, government web-based travel agencies, and customer-based review websites (e.g., TripAdvisor, Flickr). This finding supports the need for implementing Web 2.0-based content by APAC

governments in order to better promote their services. While the latter provide better results, destination marketing organizations (DMOs) and their affiliates' official blogging and photo-sharing websites are usually the first places international tourists look for travel information in the host country. This confirms the significant challenge DMOs will face if they do not adapt Web 2.0 content or social media-based, customer-generated content.

**Table 2: Key Findings of the Included Studies (Source: Authors' Research)**

Reference ID	Study Purpose	Study Design	Methodology Description	Key Findings
Buted et al. (2014)	To assess the impact of social media on the tourism industry based in the Batangas region in the Philippines.	Qualitative	A questionnaire was developed to obtain the necessary information from a total of 77 participants.	Social media platforms including Facebook and blogs were found to be the most frequently used platforms by individuals.
Chu et al. (2018)	To provide an overview of social media's influence in travel promotion.	Qualitative	A self-administered questionnaire was designed to obtain data from a total of 426 Thai participants.	Social media is an effective tool to influence people's travel intent, and tourists who frequently use social media appear to have a higher intention.
Chung et al. (2015)	To use social media as a behavioural search tool that gives travel info in South Korea.	Quantitative	A survey was presented to a wide panel of 650,000 respondents, from which final samples were chosen.	New social media users are affected by the benefits provided and the sacrifices required by social media.
Dwityas et al. (2017)	To determine how social media platforms help the decision-making process within the travel industry, especially from the viewpoint of Indonesian travellers.	Qualitative	Open-ended interviews and observation were undertaken to obtain data for this study.	Social media plays a pivotal role as an online source of information that assists Indonesian travellers at different stages of their decision-making processes.

Reference ID	Study Purpose	Study Design	Methodology Description	Key Findings
Dwivedi et al. (2011)	To determine the extent to which social media sites are used by national tourism-based organizations (NTOs) in various nations worldwide.	Qualitative	The adopted methodology was interpretive and explanatory. It relied heavily on an info search through Google and then used the obtained data to further refine the search.	All investigated countries have NTO websites. In addition, it is clearly evident that social media use among NTOs is common worldwide.
Fatanti et al. (2015)	To show the relationship between Instagram and tourism promotion based in Indonesia.	Qualitative	This study combined in-depth interviews with visual techniques and image creation.	Instagram as a popular social site is a supportive factor in creating a tourism brand in tourism destinations.
Ge et al. (2014)	To assess the reliability of Weibo as a social network in China and as a tourism promotion tool.	Quantitative	This study used a quantitative case-study approach.	The findings showed that Weibo could not be fully considered as a good tool for tourism promotion in China.
Gattu (2017)	To study the initiatives taken by the Telangana government in India to increase the number of tourists through social media.	Qualitative	This study relied on one of the governments in India as a case study for how social media could be used as a marketing tool for tourism growth in the area.	Social media platforms including Facebook and Twitter have been found to be effective tourism marketing tools in the Telangana region of India.
Hede et al. (2012)	To explore the ways Web 2.0 tools are being used by Australian tourism events to strengthen their brand communities.	Qualitative	The study used an interpretive case approach based on an in-depth interview with around 13 event managers in Australia.	Social media was found to be an effective tool in international tourism-based events in Australia.

Reference ID	Study Purpose	Study Design	Methodology Description	Key Findings
Hamid et al. (2016)	To explore how social media has a major impact on travellers' decisions to travel to Malaysia.	Qualitative	The sample included in this study came from a diverse background; convenience sampling was applied, and the questionnaire instrument was adapted from tourism literature.	Communication and virtual tour presentations have a significant effect on tourists' decisions to visit Malaysia as an Islamic destination.
Hua et al. (2017)	To present social media as an important tool when choosing a destination country for tourism.	Qualitative	This study conducted a questionnaire among Malay individuals who used social media as a tool to select a tourism destination.	The use of different social sites has an indirect impact on the selection of tourist destinations.
Indu et al. (2018)	To assess the utilization of Facebook in the marketing of tourism destinations in India.	Qualitative	This study utilised a case-study approach.	The use of Facebook assists tourists in their research and destination decision-making processes.
Karim (2018)	To evaluate how different social media platforms are playing a vital role in the development of the tourism sector in Bangladesh.	Qualitative	A survey was conducted on 1060 participants, consisting of various professionals, to investigate the perceived impact of social media on tourism.	Social media has a substantial impact on tourism growth in Bangladesh.
Ketter (2016)	To analyze the Nepal Tourism Board's usage of social media as a tool to restore the country's image following the Gurkha Earthquake.	Qualitative	An analysis was conducted of the content (posts, pictures and other content) of the Facebook page of the Nepalese Tourism Board.	Facebook was found to be a means of image restoration due to its unique characteristics as a multifunctional tool used as a means to process diverse audiences.

Reference ID	Study Purpose	Study Design	Methodology Description	Key Findings
Koo et al. (2013)	To concentrate on the effectiveness of social media in creating smart tourism that assists in delivering travel data and information in real time.	Quantitative	This web-based survey utilised questionnaires to collect data from a sample of 6,544 South Korean participants.	Social network sites have a direct impact on promoting tourism services in Korea.
Kuzma (2010)	To investigate the level of participation of 50 governments in three social media platforms as marketing tools for tourism promotion in their countries of origin.	Quantitative	The study was conducted by performing an analysis of 50 governments based in Asia by assessing their usage of social network platforms.	Around 30% of Asian governments use social media for tourism services and promotion.
Manap et al. (2013)	To pay specific attention to exploring how social media relates to both the hospitality and tourism industries.	Qualitative	A qualitative methodology approach was undertaken for the purpose of conducting this study.	Social media are neither credible nor trustworthy for providing travel information that tourists can rely on.
Park et al. (2016)	To explore how local Korean government makes use of Facebook for the development of its tourism sector.	Quantitative	Network analyses were performed to reveal which local authorities were more central in the usage of Facebook.	Local Korean government actively manages online tools including Facebook for the purpose of communication and tourism promotion.
Pabel et al. (2016)	To better understand how social media platforms can be used during tourists' pre-travel searches.	Qualitative	A case study approach was adopted to assess the use of social media by regional leisure destinations.	Social media was important for 27.9% of respondents when searching for info about their trip.

Reference ID	Study Purpose	Study Design	Methodology Description	Key Findings
Rathore et al. (2017)	To highlight the role of social media in the tourism industry.	Qualitative	This study has both primary and secondary methodological approaches. Within the primary approach, in-depth interviews with various stakeholders were conducted, while the secondary approach focused on the portals and literature of India's Ministry of Tourism.	The findings provide a better overview of the use of social media as a possible marketing tool by the government.
Tran et al. (2017)	To determine what role social media plays within a search engine in Vietnam in the tourism sector.	Qualitative	The authors adopted a content analysis approach and descriptive method in order to enhance the understanding of the subject being studied.	Social media platforms can help in displaying search results and further assist in developing an overview of the country of destination.
Usui et al. (2017)	To provide a better overview of the power social media has in the tourism industry by making use of the Ōkunoshima Island in Hiroshima, Japan, as a case study.	Qualitative	Structured interviews were designed and conducted with international and Japanese tourists who visited Ōkunoshima Island between August and October 2016.	Tourists mostly obtained information about the island by using social media. This implicated the power of social media in the development of this region in Japan.
Ravindran et al. (2018)	To explore the demographic influence that social media choices have when people need to make an informed decision.	Quantitative	A well-structured questionnaire was conducted to collect the data necessary for this study.	There is a strong correlation between social media usage and the tourism decision-making process.

Reference ID	Study Purpose	Study Design	Methodology Description	Key Findings
Sahoo et al. (2017)	To create a social media framework that successfully promotes tourism in the Odisha region of India.	Qualitative	The methodology is based on secondary data from reliable sources, as well as primary data collected in the form of interviews with industry experts.	Social media has proven to be the major source of communication spread throughout the region.
Yang et al. (2015)	To explore the use of social media as a destination marketing strategy promoting services in China.	Qualitative	By using a content analysis approach, the study explores the social marketing performance of overseas DMOs on various social media platforms.	Social media has a direct impact on tourism DMOs.

The social media fueled tourism is creating high waves, hence, this systematic review study provides a comprehensive overview of the developments in the tourism industry from the perspective of social media. Moreover, the growth of social media in the APAC region clearly has a substantial influence on the tourism industry. This systematic review further points out the valuable role social media plays as a rising marketing tool targeting online travelers. This research can support initiatives between locals and governments to develop more practical tools that further the concept of tourism developments using social media sites. The most important result and the most significant implications of these findings are how tourism industry marketers can take particular advantage of such a powerful tool in their day-to-day activities in order to attract customers' attention and motivate international tourists to participate in such virtual communities that will encourage them to travel to new destinations.

#### 4. THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

This systematic review of mainstream tourism literature offers significant contributions for research and practice. Firstly, this study specifically enriches tourism marketing research from different perspectives and approaches, hence creating solid theoretical basis for phenomenal studies in future. In a comprehensive systematic review (i.e. grouping 25 tourism focused studies) this research offers valuable and diverse insights, including, (1) different geographies; (2) employed methods; (3) nature of data; (4) level/type of analysis; and (5) unique findings, of those reviewed articles. Secondly, this systematic review reinforces prior research findings by comparative assessments, as well as creating innovative directions for future studies (Hulland and Houston 2020). This study advances research in empirical testing and theory development by connecting diverse social media factors and dynamic environments that significantly influence the global tourism industry (Dolan, Seo and Kemper 2019; Rasul and Ahmad 2019; Rasul



and Hoque 2020). Lastly, this systematic review offers a synthesis of findings for practitioners' attention and knowledge, to apply diverse set of social media applications and perspectives in tourism planning, marketing and policy making (Dolan, Seo and Kemper 2019; Shafiee et al. 2019).

## **5. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

It is acknowledged that this study has a few limitations, even though all the conventions of a systematic literature review (SLR) have been taken into account. First of all, we decided to locate studies based only on the APAC region because this was the objective of this study. Therefore, studies based on other regions (e.g., the Americas, Europe) were subsequently excluded. We admit that including studies from other regions that address the same topic could possibly add richer knowledge to our findings. Hence the need for a multinational study in different regions or different nations is exceedingly important, and our results should be better comprehended in accordance with this limitation. The next limitation is we considered only peer-reviewed articles written in the English language for this study. It is understandable that studies conducted in other languages apart from English could have strengthened the findings of this study.

Future research work thus needs to be considered for best-practice usage of such Web 2.0 content since the current period of social media usage is regarded as an important indicator of the travel decision-making process. Thereafter, locals, with the support of governments, need to focus their attention on how to create valuable resources that international tourists can rely on. Marketers also need to consider other practical approaches in accordance with the use of social media in order to achieve greater profits and, as a result, improve the economic development of many countries. Lastly, future research scope can offer methodological improvements by considering additional settings for collecting study data (e.g. longitudinal and/or cross-sectional approach) as well as conducting cross-country assessments (Zaman, Nadeem and Nawaz 2020; Zaman et al. 2019a). In the APAC tourism industry, future research can also use advance statistical techniques (e.g. partial least squares structural equation modeling) to provide supportive empirical evidence (Zaman 2020; Zaman et al. 2019b) on the impact of social media on APAC tourism industry. Importantly, some mediating (i.e. intervening) and/or moderating (i.e. interacting) conditions (Zaman 2020; Zaman, Nadeem and Nawaz 2020) can potentially create interesting explanations to better understand the link between social media and the APAC tourism.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

This study gives a clear idea of social media's impact on the tourism industry in the Asia-Pacific region. With the increased development of the tourism industry in many regions worldwide, social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have appeared as one of the biggest influences for such development. The results of this review enable us to ascertain the significant role that social media plays in developing tourism domains in the Asia-Pacific region. This makes it clear that social media is growing as a marketing tool to better engage with customers online. Our findings also confirm that the

use of social media is critical when planning a trip or travel leisure. This puts particular emphasis on the role that APAC governments have to play in order to improve their tourism growth, especially in non-popular regions and countries with rising economies and few international visitors. These results have many practical implications for both assessing the importance of social media platforms and also building the foundation for an emerging marketing tool, especially for the purpose of advancing an economy-led growth industry such as tourism.

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**Tareq Rasul**, DBA, Senior Lecturer  
Australian Institute of Business  
Department of Marketing,  
27 Currie Street, Adelaide, Australia  
Phone: +61-4-1327-1093  
E-mail: tareq.rasul@aib.edu.au

**Umer Zaman**, PhD, Assistant Professor (Corresponding Author)  
Endicott College of International Studies, Woosong University  
Department of Management Studies  
Jayang-Dong, Dong-gu, Daejeon, Republic of Korea  
Phone: +82-10-5110-4063  
E-mail: umerzaman@endicott.ac.kr

**Mohammad Rakibul Hoque**, PhD, Associate Professor  
University of Dhaka  
Department of Management Information Systems  
Nilkhet Rd, Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh  
Phone: +88-02-9661920  
E-mail: rakibul@du.ac.bd

Please cite this article as:

Rasul, T., Zaman, U., Hoque, M.R. (2020), Examining the Pulse of the Tourism Industry in the Asia-Pacific Region: A Systematic Review of Social Media, *Tourism and Hospitality Management*, Vol. 26, No. 1, pp. 173-193, <https://doi.org/10.20867/thm.26.1.10>



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